

European Youth, Its Hopes and Discontents

Report from the discussion among young people by Angelica Stickle, McDaniel College Budapest

I appreciate participating in these interviews with my peers. I have gained perspective from doing so that I would not have if I did not perform these. Before starting, I thought most would be pessimistic about the future, especially with the pandemic happening. Also, I thought there would be many more conflicting ideas. I interviewed six young people with diverse beliefs and backgrounds, yet I found shared thoughts within them. This outcome surprised me.

Most agreed that this generation of youth might be the most outspoken, but their action might be lacking. This generation is considered the most knowledgeable compared to ones in the past about climate change, mental health, social issues, etc. Salima Issina, a McDaniel student from Kazakhstan, mentioned a personal story of her talking to her cousins. She was surprised by how accepting they were about the LGBT community despite coming from parents that were homophobic. During the time this is written, she has not “come out” to them. She also talked about an ex-classmate who used to deal with being bullied but now can quickly speak up about it on social media. She can now gain support when in the past, this would have been more difficult. It was not that long ago when people would not have listened to people’s traumas. Salima says that there is more empathy in younger generations. She seemed the most positive out of the six interviewees. Andron Ashitkov, a Twenty-two-year-old Finnish citizen, sees that his generation of students is knowledgeable about world issues that can help resolve conflicts in Finland. He states that the world does not need any more conflicts. Arseny Ashitkov, a stepbrother of Andron

and Finnish and Russian citizen, says that mental health issues are getting better. Andron also shared this sentiment.

There was surprisingly much positivity for the future. Helia Shahmohammadi, a Mcdaniel student from Iran, thinks that this generation has a talent for making movements and not taking “no” for an answer. For example, when governments refuse to give the rights of the people., young people are more likely to keep pressing these issues. Andron said that technology, particularly in Europe, is helping solve relying on fossil fuels that are destroying our planet or fight diseases. Arseny thinks that even though the pandemic has brought problems, it has been a kind of restart for many. It gave time for people to rethink their lives. As I said previously, Salima was very positive about young people’s capabilities.

1 out of the 6 had a negative outlook in the future. Most were neutral to positive. It mentioned that there is divisiveness within groups of young people. Blessing Oloyede, an American citizen born in Dusseldorf, Germany, from Nigerian parents, feels that this generation can be “oversensitive.” She felt very negative towards the future and was the only one I could not get a positive statement. She also says that many are lacking in experience of life and make opinions despite this. Helia says that the “Mob Mentality” is a weakness for the young generation that is dangerous. “Mob Mentality” referring to how people will group against someone because of their different beliefs and ostracized them.

She also says that young people believe in everything they see on social media and online. Even Salima noted that young people need to learn not to take to extremes and take responsibility for their actions. Cherie Liang, a McDaniel Student from China, says that young people need to learn independent thinking skills. They need to know how to research and screen the sources.

Different issues came up with each person. Cherie says that her main worry is unemployment as an art student, especially after the pandemic. She says that Young people are more flexible about the types of jobs they want. They are willing to work remotely and are not looking for tenure. The lockdown has encouraged everything to go online. Andron worried about climate change and that in 40 years, humanity will have to face catastrophic events. Another worry is that he feels pressure to decide for his future so soon. He feels the emphasis on final exams has brought attention to those who have decided early on what to do and falters on the late bloomers. He thinks the world focuses too much on the top 5%.

Arseny says that the older generation does not understand mental health, making it more challenging with no support coming from them. He says this is more so in Russia than in Finland. Helia mentions as someone who studies art and Psychology that her major is overlooked by parents, especially those who would instead have picked a career as a doctor or lawyer. All these issues, I agree are needed to be worked on.

Being dismissed as being young was a shared feeling for many. Cherie felt that young people are not given opportunities because of the lack of experience. Also, she says that success seems to be defined by wealth and appearance. This creates much anxiety for those who do not have this, making it worse through social media. Salima says that young people are dismissed, but many young people do not have the funds to make a significant difference against older generations. But she thinks once they do, they will start to make changes.

Similarly, Helia thinks that when this generation gets older, it will make significant differences. For liberal arts students, that feeling is enhanced. Cherie mentions that job markets in Europe seem to cater more to Tech companies and commercial marketing than jobs for liberal arts majors. A lot of liberal arts students are graduating but having to compete for a limited job

market. This problem creates much stress. An example of the opposite is Blessing, a chemistry graduate who does not feel this kind of stress and unappreciation. The other students, such as Andron, who studied hospitality, or Arseny, who studied cooking, also do not feel underappreciated in what their field is.

Through these interviews, I see that there is something in the young generation that we share despite differences. Young people understand that it is possible that now we have the most available knowledge than ever. Yet, it feels like there is a lack of change being done. Most feel impotent because of their age. Most of them thought positively for their generation despite challenges ahead, which is better now than in the past. I think this is reassuring to know. It is common now to hear on the media how much people disagree and hate each other. To found out that this might not be so true is a small glimmer of hope for me. I have also learned things from people I thought I already knew very well but still learned new things about them. It has also made me feel about continuing these conversations. It is impressive to see that people very different from each other agree more than one would think. And I think they would not have known that most agreed with each other. I hope that more people, even older generations realize that the division is not as far as one would think. It is possible to be able to work together to help overcome large and complicated issues.